

Snapshots from Mahatma Jotirao Phule's life, through the eyes of his close aide

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(Translated from Marathi to English by Sonali Kale and Tejas Harad)

After Mahatma Jotirao Phule's death, I had prepared his short biographical sketch in January 1891 on the instructions of Savitribai Phule. This biography was published in the book Sarvajanic Satya Dharma Pustak (the book of universal religion of truth) under Yashvantrao Phule's name. Later Yashvantrao Jotirao Phule had expressed his desire to write a full-length biography of Mahatma Phule, but since Yashvantrao passed away soon after, this task remained incomplete.

Since the task of writing a biography appropriate to this Mahatma's stature seemed difficult and monumental, I shied away from it. I had thought about writing Mahatma Jotirao's biography long ago but for the reason stated above, the thought dried in my mind only. I had taken some notes during the times I spent with Mahatma Jotirao for my personal use. I am writing this current essay using those notes and whatever I remember now about those times.

In your letter, you have written that I should send some information about myself too. Therefore, let me write about myself in brief here.

I was born in Hadapsar in the year 1871. My father, Ganapatrao Kale, was a resident of Hadapsar. I studied in Hadapsar till I was 12, and then I went to Pune for primary and secondary education. I faced a lot of obstacles in my education because my father died when I was just 10. It became really difficult to study further.

My father's farms were next to Mahatma Phule's farms in Manjari. Therefore, from the very beginning, Mahatma Phule and my father had friendly relations with each other. And that is why, after my father passed away, my mother employed me under Mahatma Jotirao Phule as his clerk. When I was studying in Pune, I was living at Mahatma Jotirao Phule's house only. Since I was about 7, I have often visited Jotirao at his farms in Manjari or his home in Pune with my father.

He used to feel happy around children. He would pick them up, play with them and give them something to eat. I, too, was one of those lucky kids. Years later, when I became an adult, I noticed that Jotirao would still enjoy talking to kids. He would always give these kids something to eat, and to the schoolgoing kids, he would give slates, pencils and papers. There would always be a small stock of slates and pencils in his house. He used to distribute it after he was done talking, playing, and entertaining the kids. Therefore, kids would crowd around him once in a while.

I lived with Mahatma Jotirao from the year 1881 to 1884 as a student. After that, from the year 1884 to 1891, I lived at his house and would also have my meals there as I worked as his clerk. A few days after he passed away, I quit my job, moved to Hadapsar and started looking after my agriculture and other work. After some time, I started taking interest in civil society work.

I opened a co-operative society in Hadapsar. This society turned out to be quite successful. The Governor of Bombay, who later became the Viceroy of India¹ visited this society; so did Viceroy Lord Dufferin who showered praise on us. For my work in the cooperative society, the government bestowed the title of Raosaheb on me.

Right now I am 69 years old and by god's grace, my health is in fine condition. I still carry out my daily chores and other work-related activities. I have, in brief, written only facts about my life in the passages above. Now for whatever public work I have done, I should give the credit to the teachings of Mahatma Jotirao Phule.

I came in contact with Mahatma Jotirao for about 9-10 years towards the end of his life when my thoughts had not really matured. I considered it my duty to stay near him and do the work he would ask me to, and that was all. My mother had employed me with Mahatma Jotirao with the pragmatic thought that I would learn accountancy working under him; I would get to meet renowned people there; and Jotirao would increase my wages periodically. I always feel sad that since I was immature at that age, I could not properly understand the virtues and greatness that Mahatma Jotirao Phule possessed.

Now let me write about Mahatma Jotirao. I am writing this based on my own observations when I lived with him and also what I heard when I was there.

Jotirao was born in 1827 in Pune. He was born in the early hours of the day that saw a major fire tragedy engulfing Shaniwar Wada.² After facing many obstacles, he had completed his education till 7th standard (English). The biography³ written in 1927 describes his initiation into social work, and his accomplishments in the former years — the schools he started for girls, Mahars and Mangs, widow remarriages, establishment of orphanages, etc. I will avoid repeating the same here. He established Satyashodhak Samaj on 24 September 1873. He used to travel extensively across villages to campaign for the society.

In 1877, the southern provinces faced a major drought situation. At that time, Jotirao had started a food distribution camp at Dhankawadi⁴ for children and

the disabled. Around 2,000 bhakris (round bread) were distributed twice a day. He took special care to make sure that children got proper nourishment with the food that was distributed. He used to be apprehensive that if the children were to take the food away, someone might snatch it from there, or their parents might eat it leaving the child hungry. I can now recall some instances from those times. People from my village used to bring their children to the camp. I myself went there many times. They used to give me half a bhakri which used to be enough for me.

Around the same time, Jotirao had started cultivation in his farms which were adjacent to our land. He maintained the farms for quite a long time. I vividly remember the times after the drought. Whenever I went to the farms with my father, and after my father died, with my mother, I would make it a point to visit Jotirao's farms.

The motive behind such excursions was always selfish. My cravings for fruits like papaya, bananas, sugarcane were fulfilled there.

Being the neighbour's kid, Jotirao had given me permission to eat whichever fruits I wanted. For that he had given special instructions to his employees. The workers, too, eventually realised that Jotirao and my father had familial relations, and once I started living with Jotirao I began to oversee a small section of the farms myself.

Mahadu Waghule's father Sahadu used to supervise Jotirao's farms. Sahadu Waghule used to look after the farms and its sales. The farms in Manjari were spread over a huge area comprising survey no.114 and its adjacent coordinates. Farm animals, godowns and workers were stationed in survey no.114. The land could be measured upto 60 acres. About 15-19 bullocks, 2-3 cows, and 10-12 workers used to work there on a permanent basis, while additional workers were employed from time to time as the need arose.

The whole scene used to be like a caravan. He used to earn in hundreds per month from these farms.

Whenever he was in the city, Jotirao used to visit the farms on a daily basis. He would travel from Pune either by cart or by riding a horse. He used to be adamant about driving his own carriage, even when he had company. He was very fond of driving. Sometimes, he would take a stop at our village — Hadapsar. And as soon as the news about his arrival would spread, people would gather around him in large numbers. The Sasanes from our village were his relatives. Through one of his relatives, Gyanaba Krishnaji Sasane,

Jotirao had started a primary school in Hadapsar. Due to this, Jotirao had gained huge respect from our village folks. My primary schooling was completed in this same school.

Owing to their ignorance, farmers were hesitant to use the water from newly constructed Mula–Mutha dam. People were fooled into believing that the state was going to acquire their lands and Jotirao had joined hands with the state. No one was ready to use this irrigated water. Only some educated residents of Pune who had their farms in the outskirts took advantage of this water. Jotirao campaigned from village to village to spread awareness and convince farmers to use the water. Among the farmers, Jotirao was the first one to make use of this new dam water and thus he grew many crops in his farms. Looking at his farms, people realised that the water is good for the crops as well as profitable.

A pipeline was dug from Jotirao's farms. It is in operation even now. From that day onwards, the pipeline was named after Phule.

Jotirao grew a lot of crops in his farms. During those times, people were not very keen on growing exotic vegetables, fruits, and flowers. Jotirao was the first one to grow these crops. When Jotirao started earning good profits, farmers gave up their misconceptions and started growing the same crops. He grew crops like tomatoes, pomegranates, figs, lemons, bananas, brinjal, and sugarcane. Some were of indigenous variety while others were exotic.

Jotirao grew sugarcane on 25 acres of his land thinking irrigated water would ensure a good crop and which in turn could be used to produce jaggery. He was proved right, and every year he sold jaggery worth thousands of rupees. The Manjari we see today has become a paradise for goods like sugar and jaggery: no doubt the whole credit of this development goes to Jotirao's vision.

After facing some problems Jotirao sold this piece of land around 1886-87.

In these fields, Jotirao had built a house out of haystack. It was surrounded by different native and exotic varieties of flowers. Thus it had become a beautiful place. Savitrimai and Yashwantrao both used to visit the place, usually on Sundays. Sometimes, I used to accompany them. We would feast on bhakaris packed from home and if Jotirao (aka Tatya) was around, he would regale us with his stories. It used to be a day off from work. Thus, it meant unending fun: eating together, relishing fruits and telling stories. We would lose sense of

time. At the end of the day, Jotirao would think of all the pending work and then he would hurriedly take out his carriage and rush to reach home early.

However, these kinds of free days were very few in Jotirao Phule's life. I can only count three or four instances where he had spent the time happily till the evening.

Jotirao was always occupied with some or the other work. He used to patiently complete his tasks. He had completed his work 'The Cultivator's Whipcord' in the beautiful hut he had built in his fields. He had divided the work into four parts and sent the English translated versions to the then Viceroy Lord Lytton. This was in the year 1882. The fourth part of the essay was a hard-hitting critique of the British state written with an infuriated mind. Many friends and wellwishers advised Phule not to send the essay to the Governor General as it expressed dissent towards the government in power. However, resisting his friends' concerns and with great courage, he sent the report to the viceroy. He never feared anyone in his life.

In current times, many people criticise the government and get applauded, felicitated, and, at times, secure election tickets. But those times were different. He never expected anything in return. The government commanded great authority in those times. Jotirao was the first person to vehemently criticise the English administration. The white administrators with their huge incomes would waste their time in hunting, drinking, and in other leisure activities. They had no time to address the concerns of the poor peasants or to provide them education to make them aware, thus Jotirao would strongly critique the government through his speeches and writings. No one used to be this critical in those times. Due to this reason, many of his former British friends held a grudge against him. Hence he also stopped visiting the European officials.

Other than agriculture, his sources of income were contractual works, a vegetable shop, and selling moulds.

The Katraj tunnel on the Pune-Satara road was completed some time before my birth. He had taken a contract for that work. Apart from this, he had taken a contract to provide stones, lime to the construction of Mula-Mutha dam, and Yerwada bridge.

The construction of barracks and digging of pipes under the Mula-Mutha dam were done by Jotirao himself. He used to store stones, bricks and lime, and sell them. He earned thousands in profit through these contract works.

At that time, Jotirao's shop was the only place where exported moulds were available. There were two workers to look after the shop. Every day, he used to earn a profit of Rs 50–100. He made thousands of rupees in this business.

Along with this, he had opened a shop in Pune's market to sell fruits and vegetables at wholesale price and to transport it to Mumbai. Late Gyanaba Krishnaji Sasane used to look after the shop. But this business did not prove to be very profitable.

Jotirao would productively manage his time and work. Although he devoted very little time to all these businesses, he would skillfully look after their management. He used to spend the remaining time in social work. In the field of social work, too, he productively used his time. He used to handle multiple works at the same time. This was his special attribute.

He used to tour in the areas of Mumbai, Junnar, Satara, Solapur, Nagar, Konkan to expand Satyashodhak Samaj's work. During 1883–87, he did a great work of spreading awareness in the Junnar area. At that time, he organised a peasant's strike against moneylenders. Peasants took hold of thousands of acres of land owned by Brahmin and Marwari moneylenders. With the spread of Satyashodhak Samaj through villages, people began to perform religious ceremonies on their own and hundreds of new schools were opened for the education of girls and boys.

He started a big movement to ensure every caste gets representation proportionate to its population in government jobs. Peasants should get free from the forest department's torture; peasants should be relieved of excessive taxes; the government should help the farmers to improve farming techniques; build canals; primary education should be made compulsory and free; the children of farmers should get assistance in higher education; the problems faced by labourers working in mines, mills, and other industries should be addressed, and they should be able to live as humans: for many causes like these, Jotirao created movements.

Through his friend Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, he formed a big organisation of mill workers in Mumbai. With the help of late Bhau Kondaji Dumbare, he had organised a great movement in the Junnar area and created awareness.

He was a member of Pune Municipal Corporation for 8 to 10 years. That time, he took many steps through the municipal corporation to develop the city of Pune. But he had to leave this job due to workload. Mr Plankitt, the Collector

of Pune, requested him to be a member of the Municipal Council but he refused.

Jotirao had started schools for Mahars and Mangs and he himself taught there. The teachers used to be addressed as Tatya Pantoji in those times. Following the same rule, everyone fondly called him Tatya. Thus in this part of the writing I'm using 'Tatya' instead of his name.

Tatya had some European friends. One of them was Mr Plankitt, the magistrate of Pune city. He had another European friend in the forest department. These two officers used to visit him frequently. Mr Plankitt was a kind gentleman. I'm unable to recall the forest officer's name, thus I can't write more about him. Every year Tatya used to visit the officer's bungalow for the work of levy. Horsemen would specially be sent to his house with the invitation of Aam Darbar called by the Lord Governor. Like European officers, some Indian officers also used to visit him. I have seen Justice Ranade⁵ frequently visiting him. Tatya also used to return the visits of these officers.

Tatya was a person of sweet nature. He didn't usually scold anyone. He used to get a little angry when some servant or person working under him made any mistake, although that wouldn't last very long. After some time he would lovingly advise the person not to repeat the mistake. I was at the receiving end of such advice four to five times.

Now, I'll describe his daily routine. Every day, he used to wake up at 4 am. After getting fresh, at 5 am he used to go for a walk towards Parvati hill. After leaving home, he would meet his usual friends on the way. He would immediately take a bath after coming from the walk. For breakfast he used to take roasted bhakri in a quarter litre of milk.

After getting this all done, he would start his regular work at seven in the morning. When not out of town, he used to spend his day by meeting his visitors, going out to visit other people, reading, and writing. His home was at Junaganj Peth in Pune.

Nowadays, in that building there is an organisation called Savatamali Boarding House. That building was constructed by Tatya himself. It had four to five rooms, including one living room, kitchen, middle room, and a storehouse. The living room had a sitting arrangement with a table and three to four chairs. It was the place where he used to meet his visitors.

He had created a small room in a corner of the verandah where he used to sit for reading and writing. The room had one cupboard, a small table and a chair. The cupboard housed a small library. It had both English and Marathi books. The daily newspaper used to be kept in one corner.

Sometimes, when busy writing, he would postpone his lunch. But usually his lunch time was 12 noon and he would have dinner at 7 pm. At 10 o'clock at night he would go to sleep.

Sometimes due to guests or occupation with reading and writing, his bedtime would get extended. But at those instances, too, he would wake up at 4 am in the morning.

Sometimes he would take his horse for a stroll in the morning. He owned a medium quality horse. His lifestyle was very simple. He used to tie a turban, usually red in colour, but in his older days it used to be white. He used to don a simple Uparna⁶. Sometimes he would wear a long Angarkha⁷ while at times a large coat. It would be white in colour. He used to stitch his clothes from his favourite tailor in Pune. He would carry a stick for support. His shoes used to be simple, made from the local cobbler. He had a habit of getting his body massaged, usually every day in the evening.

Tatya was very fond of the king of Baroda, Sayajirao Gayakwad. He would visit Baroda once in a year and stay there for 14-15 days. Once, he stayed there for almost three months. When Maharaj used to visit Pune, he would send a cart to Jotirao's house and call him for a visit.

Jotirao strived hard to convince the king to help reformation of the backward Bahujan samaj. Tatya got really happy when he succeeded in his attempts and the king actually started looking after the problems of the Bahujan Samaj.

Tatya would really get content and happy seeing people like Srimant Sayajirao Gayakwad, Bhau Kondaji Patil, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Narayanrao Meghaji Lokhande, Dr Ramji Santuji Lad, Dr Vishram Ramji Ghole, Swami Vainkayya Ramayya Ayyavaru, Pandit Dhonduram Namdev, Devrao Thosar, etc, striving hard to work for the upliftment of the Bahujan Samaj.

"Now my work is over. The mission I undertook can't be stopped now. Many people who feel towards the cause and are hard working have now associated with my work. In the near future, the Bahujan samaj will be awakened and socially uplifted. Although I will not be a witness to it but the whole world will be able to see it," he used to say this to his wife. His heart

would be full with happiness whenever any of those mentioned above would visit him.

He had organised a huge flag rally of the Samaj in 1885 on the occasion of Gudi Padwa. He would get visitors everyday from different places. He would welcome them with great respect. He didn't have the habit of eating Pan Supari (betel nut) or smoking cigarettes, thus the visitors were not given any of those. He would give them a bouquet of flowers as a parting gift.

Some Brahmin men used to visit him with regard to some work. He would be specially hospitable towards them. He never got angry with them in private meetings. Thus, Brahmins visiting him would form a good opinion of him. He used to channel his anger towards the Brahmin community only through his writings, books, and speeches.

Every day, some or the other visitor used to join him for lunch or dinner. When his follower from the Mahar caste, late Gopal Buva Valangkar, used to visit him, all the present parties would sit together for a communal meal. Untouchability or purity codes were never followed in his house nor in the kitchen. He used to despise those who followed practices like untouchability. Sometimes, those visitors who otherwise followed purity codes, had no other option but to sit and eat together with Mr Valangkar.

He was friends with people from Pune's Gosavi community such as the late Mr Bholagir and Mr Nageshwargir. They were wealthy people. Mr Bholagir's daughter was married to a poor but brilliant lad named Hariraoji Chiplunkar. This marriage was arranged by Tatya. Later Hariraoji acquired great qualifications and till the end, remained a true follower of Tatya.

Heeding to the requests of friends from Mumbai, Tatya had opened a hostel for students coming from backward castes near his home. Around 25-30 students from places like Mumbai, Junnar, and Thane used to live there. Children from the rich families had to pay while those coming from poor families could live there free of cost. Tatya used to take care of around 15 students at his own expense.

Jotirao did a great job of providing education in his life. He would generously help any student coming from a poor family. He used to regularly donate money for slates, pencils and books. His house was like a temple of education. He spent a large proportion of his income on this work. He strongly believed that people from our country cannot progress without education. Thus he would always give something to students coming to seek help from

him. After Tatyā's demise, the boarding house opened by him was managed by Savitribai and Yashwantrao. However they had to shut it down due to poor financial conditions.

Jotirao was a skillful orator. He had honed the skill of persuading others. People would get impressed the moment he would start speaking. He was straightforward in his speeches, which would sometimes make people think of him as impolite. He never kept the truth hidden. He was a follower of truth. It would not be an overstatement to say that he was an ideal example of a person speaking truth and acting truth. He used to dislike lies. He would speak frankly regardless of the stature of the person standing before him. But many people used to dislike his bluntness.

He was an avid reader and a prolific writer. He used to read English and Marathi books. He would mark important points with a pencil. His favourite book was 'Rights of Man' written by Thomas Paine. He also possessed other works by Thomas Paine. Other than these he also had other English books.

He used to dislike the intermediary role performed by Jesus in the religion of Christianity. He used to debate this with the European missionaries. However, he would accept with an open mind that the social equality in Islam, Christianity, and Buddhist religion is much greater than that of Hindu religion. He was especially critical of the inequality in Hindu religion.

He would publicly highlight and write that every human being should have equal rights in all fields. He wrote some books in his life, but more important than that he wrote short articles on a wide range of subjects. His articles would get published in the periodical 'Dinbandhu'. If the files of those days were available, it would have been a major contribution to the Marathi literature.

As a writer, he pulled no punches. He never worried about displeasing anyone. Once he sat at his desk, he used to write with speed. On finishing an article, he would edit it with pencil marks. I used to make the final copy of his drafts. I was employed for this particular job. I have made final drafts of many of his articles, small works like the Cultivator's Whipcord, issues of Satsar, Ishara and Sarvajanic Satyadharma Pustak. While writing 'Satyadharma', he had employed a second assistant. In this book, he has written about the religions of the world and has acclaimed humanistic religion that is the religion of truth.

When Aryans invaded this country and defeated the original inhabitant kings, they created artificial caste segregation to perpetuate their dominance. Before that, everyone belonged to only one caste and that was Kshatriya, was the theory of Jotirao. According to him, everyone else other than the Brahmins were the original Kshatriyas of this country. He was proud of the Kshatriyas.

He had written a powada about one of these Kshatriyas—Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. He saw Shri Shivaji Maharaj's tomb at Raigad in 1885. He wrote an article about its dilapidated condition and the need for its reconstruction in Dinbandhu. After some days, he called a conference with regards to Shivaji memorial under the presidency of Chaphalkar Swami. It is evident that he was the first proponent of Shivaji Maharaj's memorial in our country. In this conference, a committee was appointed for the above-mentioned work. But I didn't hear anything about the committee after that.

Tatya had maintained a book for the registration of Satyashodhak Samaj's members. Every member would contribute four annas per year. Earlier, Tatya used to keep the accounts of Satyashodhak Samaj. But afterwards that work was handed over to me.

In addition, from 1887 he handed over the work of keeping his personal accounts to me. The cash required for monthly expenses used to be given to Savitribai, and she herself used to keep its account. I used to manage the other books of Satyashodhak Samaj and its paperwork under the supervision of Jotirao. Every Sunday night, weekly meetings of the society used to be held at the late Bhau Manasaram Bhaware Naik's house. The annual festival of the samaj used to be held on September 24. The new members of the society had to perform Bel bhandara - Tali⁸ and take an oath to follow the principles of the samaj. But this tradition of Bel bhandara was discontinued afterwards. I do not know the reason.

Now I will write a little about Savitribai and Yashwantrao. Jotirao had opened a nursing home to carry out secret deliveries of widowed women so that they wouldn't have to go through abortion. Yashwantrao was a child of one such Brahmin widow. There were many children in this nursing home but most of them died early. I did not see any of them except Yashwantrao. Savitribai did not have a biological child. Jotirao and her raised Yashwantrao like their own child.

Yashwant was a quiet and good natured boy. He was a few years younger to me. Tatya and Savitribai both had immense love for their child. Yashwant also had accepted them as his own parents. He was still in school when Jotirao

passed away. After passing medical exams, he gave exams for military recruitment of doctors. Once he read an essay on social issues before Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj at his bungalow in Pune. Maharaj was so impressed by the essay that he requested Yashwantrao to join him in his administration. But Yashwantrao refused the offer. He did not want to be a part of royal service. After all, he was raised under Jotirao and Savitribai's training. Savitribai undoubtedly took a lot of care when Jotirao was struck with illness, but Yashwant also nursed his father with great devotion.

It will take another independent biography to write about mother Savitribai. The major credit of Jotirao's success goes to Savitribai. Not a single trace of anger was known to her. She always had a happy face with a faint smile. People would fondly call her Kaku. She used to get elated when any guest would visit their house. She would cook special meals for them with great excitement. She was very loving and kind.

In her life she not only helped spread education but she also nourished people with her food. As if it was her mission to insist visitors to have meals. Jotirao used to give great respect to Savitribai. He used to call her "Aho Kaho" - using plural pronouns to indicate respect. Savitribai used to call Jotiba "Shetji". The couple had true love between them.

Tatya would never do any work without Savitribai's consent. She was very wise and far-sighted. At the time of their marriage, Jotirao was eleven years old while Savitribai was seven years old. Savitribai's parental home was Zagadyachi Wadi near Pune. Her father was the chief of the village and was wealthy. He had arranged a big wedding ceremony for his daughter's marriage. He had brought an elephant for his daughter and son-in-law's wedding procession.

Savitribai was good looking. She was respected by everyone. Especially after the spread of women's education, educated women's gratitude towards Savitribai had grown as she had taught in the Girls' schools established by Jotirao. She would always guide the girls and women that would come to her. Some of the Pune's educated women would come to visit her.

A missionary woman (name not mentioned) used to reside in Pune. Her brother was once a viceroy of Hindustan. She would often visit Savitribai for discussions. She used to speak good Marathi. Pandita Ramabai and Dr Anandibai Joshi had visited Savitribai two to three times. Apart from this, many other women used to visit her.

A childhood friend of Jotirao, late Moro Vitthal Walvekar, would often come to visit him and they would talk about women's empowerment. On Savitribai's suggestion, Walvekar had started "Gruhini" – a magazine completely dedicated to women's issues. It used to publish articles on women's education and their equal status in society. Kaku used to eagerly wait for the monthly copy of the magazine and would read it with great interest. She would also send short articles for the magazine. But she used to be hesitant to publish it under her name. She would write the articles under a pen name or under her friends' names. She was not very interested in receiving praise for her work.

In spite of Jotiba's continued insistence she did not agree to getting photographed.

She was very fond of her female students. She used to reward them with academic books. Some of Tatya's cousins and nephews would go against him. But Savitribai did not harbour ill will against anyone. On festivals and special occasions, she would invite everyone to their home and would host a meal. But sometimes Tatya didn't like it. Thus, Savitribai would call guests when Tatya would leave the town. Once Tatya would come to know of this, with little anger he would ask, "What is this? Why are you spending so much for these kinds of people?" Savitribai would then laughingly answer, "They are eating off their father's money." Tatya would laugh hearing this answer and his anger would dissolve into laughter.

Like Tatya, Savitribai used to dress simply. She would not wear any ornaments. A simple black chain and mangalsutra in the neck and a large vermillion mark on forehead. She would get ready before sunrise and complete other household works. Her home always used to be clean. Their house was known for cleanliness. She would not tolerate any dust or litter in their living room. The utensils and other stuff used to be neat and clean.

Savitribai was assisted by a woman and a man for domestic work. She herself used to cook. She was so dedicated that sometimes when Tatya would call her, even while eating she would wash hands and answer him. And when Tatya would come to know of this, he would feel bad and ask her, "Why did you leave your meal for me? I did not know you were eating." Then Kaku would answer, "I came because you called me." I have seen these incidents many times.

She would take great care of Tatya's health and diet. Around 1888, when Tatya suffered from paralysis, this mother Savitri took great care of him. It

would not be an overstatement to say that it was due to her care that Tatya could come out of this disease.

Since Mahatma Jotirao had expended all his money in public work, he was facing financial hardships in his last days. One can't put a price on the treatment that doctor Vishram Ramji Ghole arranged for Jotirao during his illness. Ghole was a very renowned doctor in Pune at that time. He did not charge Tatya a single rupee for the medicines and his treatment. After Shrimant Sayajirao Gaekward heard about Tatya's illness and financial problems, he sent one thousand rupees for expenses. The money that remained unutilised, including monetary aid sent by a Gosavi friend, were deposited in the Satyashodhak Samaj fund.

Since Tatya's right hand had become paralysed in the illness, he had started writing with his left hand. One can see his workaholism from this example. After two and a half years, he again fell sick from the same illness. He was ill for two months before he eventually breathed his last. However, whenever he felt even a little better, he would put a mattress in the front yard, take a pillow and lie there. But in his last three-four days, he did not step out of the house at all. Earlier in those two months, he would eat poli for lunch and rice for dinner.

In his last two-three days, he sent mail to some of his friends and called them for a visit. Other friends from Pune were also called. Many distinguished personalities like Mama Parmanand, Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Smt Pandita Ramabai, Hariraoji Chiplunkar, Nageshwar Gir, Bhau Kondaji Patil had already paid a visit to him in the last two months of his illness.

However, on receiving his mail, late Narayanrao Meghaji Lokhande, Ramayya Vyankaiyya, Moropant Walavekar and some 10-15 other people from Mumbai reached on the afternoon of November 27, 1890. Dr Lad from Thane also reached on the morning of that day. Everybody had lunch. On Tatya's instructions, Dr Ghole from Pune, Pandit Dhonduram, Gyanaba Sasane from Hadapsar, Krishnaji Pandurang Bhalekar were called in the evening. Thus everybody had gathered. I called you all as I have not much time left, he told everyone. As he handed over Yashwantrao and Savitribai to the people, he said, "Friends, please take care of these two. There's no one to look after them except you. I have been feeling weak for the last 2-3 days." Everyone had tears in their eyes. Then he gave last counsel to the people gathered there.

“I am feeling happy about getting to meet you all in my last moments and to see you taking forward the work of Satyashodhak Samaj founded by me. Now I can happily surrender to death. Our Bahujan community has found itself in the deep pit of suffering. You must uplift it and bring it to the path of progress; and I am sure you will work towards that goal. I have done whatever I was capable of in my whole life. And in that I achieved some success. But I am not satisfied with this little success. I request you to complete that work. You will face many hurdles but you should not get discouraged. Believe in truth and keep working hard; god will definitely grant you success. Even if I leave this world, my soul will be here to help you. I will fight time to ensure that. You should attend to worldly affairs and not feel bad even if I leave you all.” In this way he consoled everybody.

There was a pin-drop silence in the room as he spoke. However, some people started crying. Savitribai was crying as if a river of tears was flowing through her eyes. She had given up. Everyone else had lost hope. But they thought Tatya would live for at least three-four more days. All of them sat there till the evening but later, except for Lokhande from Mumbai and their 2-3 friends, everyone else left for their respective places.

Bhau Kondaji Patil from Latur arrived that night. Tatya could not talk much with him. He asked Patil to take care of Savitribai and Yashwantrao after him. At 8.30 pm, Tatya instructed everybody to have dinner and sleep, and hurried to retire. Kaku grew more suspicious. Rather than sleeping as per his usual schedule, he was wide awake observing us. As midnight passed, he held Savitribai's hand and said, “Do you want to say something?” Kaku started crying. He spoke a few words about Kaku and Yashwant.

At last, he uttered “God” and asked us to start singing bhajan. But we could not control our tears. By signaling his finger towards his eyes, he asked us to not cry. He could not utter a single word. After that, he did not move. We could hear some obscure sound of “God! God!” from his mouth. But that also stopped after sometime. He was periodically closing and opening his eyes. When it was 20 minutes past 2 o'clock according to the clock in the living room, he took a short breath and left this world.

We had sent some men to call Dr Ghole earlier when Tatya was talking to Yashwant and Savitribai. But by the time Dr Ghole came, it was already late. Dr Ghole gave a loud cry seeing Tatya's body. It was a loud chaos as everyone started crying.

The news about his death spread all over the city. People started moving towards his house in large groups. More people gathered in the morning. The news about his death was sent to areas like Hadapsar, Khadki, Ghorpadi, Zagadyachi Wadi, etc. People from villages also started coming. However, there was a big confusion about who should carry the body and where the body should be buried. This question arose because Tatya had built a mausoleum in his yard to bury his body. He had asked Dr Ghole in advance and others to first, bury his body in the mausoleum; and second, not to let his kinsfolk, who drank water from Brahmins' feet, touch his body.

Dr Ghole tried to get permission from the government to bury his body in the mausoleum. But his request was not granted. Hence it was decided to take his body out of the city area. However, at that moment Tatya's kinsfolk came forward and started creating a fuss. Baba Phule and Mahadaba Phule claimed that Jotirao was their kinsman: he was a father figure to them. "We will carry his body and we will carry the water pot⁹." Savitribai and other Samajists (members of Satyashodhak Samaj) refused their demands. The Phule brothers also insisted, "Yashwant does not belong to us, we cannot let him hold the water pot." Tatya's nephew Ganpatrao was out of Pune for work. His son, though, was present. However they did not let him carry the pot either. Gajanan was younger then: he did not insist. Dr Ghole called the police and made Jotirao's kinsfolk leave.

Jotirao's body was carried by people of different castes who had achieved high ranks in their life. The water pot was carried by Savitribai with Yashwant and Gajanan holding her hands on either side. As the funeral procession was passing through the city, people were consumed with grief. Everybody was sad. Some Mahars and Mangs were crying loudly. Around 2,000-2,500 people were gathered when the body reached the crematorium.

Before the cremation, Dr Vishram Ghole, Bhau Kondaji Patil, Krishnarao Bhalekar, Pandit Dhondiram, and Yashwant Phule gave memorial speeches. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon, the body was cremated.

On the third day, a procession with instruments, Lezim¹⁰, Dandpatta¹¹, was taken out to bring home the remnants¹². People bestowed flowers onto it and the remnants were buried in the moratorium. The 10th day and 13th day ceremonies were observed. But the orthodox practices like offering hair or offering rice to the crow were rejected. In this way, the lifetime of the Mahatma came to an end.

Jotirao was truly a Mahatma. I will say he strived hard for the betterment of the whole human race. His work was not for any particular caste but for the whole humankind. Hence, we should call him Mahatma. Shrimant Sayajirao Maharaj Gaekwad used to call him Mahatma. On Maharaj's directions, three years before Jotirao's death, people from Mumbai had organised a conference to bestow the title of Mahatma on Jotirao.

Hardly anyone addressed him as Mahatma during his lifetime. However like a blooming flower, the fragrance of his work and greatness is spreading through the whole country. It is obvious that this event brings immense joy to an old person like me. I have briefly described about his lifetime, now I will write some of the experiences I shared -

1. This is a story from my childhood. I was 9/10 years old when my father died. The 10th day ceremony was arranged as per the customs. On that day around 300-400 people sat to eat in the alley in front of our house. The menu was Varan Bhaat and Poli. Everyone is aware of what kind of food is served in the villages. Tatya sat there along with the others without any hesitation. This shows how Tatya had a big heart.
2. One day in the morning, when I went to Tatya's farm in Manjari, a small group of labourers was having breakfast. When I went further, I was surprised to see Tatya sitting with them. Everyone was sharing their bhakri (bread) to make a common meal. To add taste there was fresh radish, carrot, onions, garlic from the farms. No wonder I had started salivating. Tatya called me and asked me to partake in the meal. I was waiting only. The food was really delicious. Tatya would have

these occasional meals with the workers.

3. Once when Mahatma Jotirao had gone to visit Shrimant Sayajirao Maharaj Gaekwad, Jotirao requested him to send his photo for the living room. Maharaj promised that he would send a photo in a few days. In 4-8 days, a person in Maharaj's service came with the photo. Maharaj had many ornaments on his body. Tatya returned the photo with a letter saying he didn't want a royal portrait. He asked to send a photo in simple clothes without ornaments. In a few days, Maharaj sent another photo, this time in simple clothes. There was not a single ornament on the body. Maharaj was sitting on a horse, a sword hanging from his waist and the lead in both his hands. Tatya really liked this photo; he wrote a letter to Maharaj conveying the same. Tatya put up this photo in his living room right at the front door.
4. When Tatya established schools for Mahars and Mangs, two assassins tried to take his life. One of them was Dhonduram Namdev. Later, he became Tatya's student. On Tatya's suggestion, he went to Kashi and became a Pandit. This pandit would work day and night under Tatya's guidance to campaign for Satyashodhak Samaj. This Pandit would give references from Sanskrit texts and expose

Brahmins' deceit through his speeches. Once his speech was organised in front of Shaniwar Wada in the evening. A Brahmin police inspector was present in the talk. Listening to the Pandit's speech, he became infuriated. With the help of another policeman, the inspector brought Pandit to the police station and locked him up. Tatya was home. As soon as he got the news he went to the police station. The policeman was frightened to see him. As Tatya began to speak he quickly apologised. Tatya forgave him and assured that he will not write to the senior inspector about this incident. I dropped the Pandit home.

5. On starry nights Yashwant and his friends would gather in the courtyard to chit-chat. And once everyone became sure that Tatya is sleeping, then our talks would become more interesting. Sometimes instead of sleeping, Tatya would intentionally listen to our stories and eventually join us. He would tell funny stories and make our gathering more interesting. He was fond of taking part in children's amusement. At times like these, he would also warn us to sleep early.
6. The Brahmins would treat the other castes as inferior. They would employ women from other castes for lesser works like cleaning the floor, washing clothes, rinsing, etc. But they

would not allow poor Brahmin women to do the same kind of work in rich households of other castes. Seeing this, Jotirao would be pained. Thus, he had deliberately employed an old Brahmin woman to do lesser works in our household in return for large payment. Her name was Gangubai. She would do the chores like sweeping, rinsing dishes and sometimes cooking. Although Tatya had employed her to tease the Brahmins, he would treat her with respect. He and other members in the house would respectfully call her 'Mai'. When Brahmins got to know of this, they were infuriated. The woman did not have any children. Her condition was poor. She was employed here for one and a half years. Then after some Brahmin's intervention, a relative came to take her along with him as a guest. She took a leave for 15 days and went along with him. The relative did not allow her to return to Pune. Tatya had highlighted this difference between Brahmin and non-brahmin women in his poem "Kulambin" which was published in Dinbandhu.

7. On March 2, 1888, Hariraoji Chipalunkar hosted Queen Victoria's son Duke of Connaught — who was the head of army for Southern India — for a meal in Pune. Jotirao was also invited for this meal. For the event, he

dressed as a quintessential farmer. He wore an old turban. Instead of wearing a shirt, he just took a Ghongadi¹³ on his shoulders and draped a short dhoti around his waist. He took a stick in his hands and wore a pair of torn chappals. Like a farmer, he put a sickle on his waist. In this attire he went to attend the feast. Looking at his rustic attire, the soldiers at the gate did not allow Jotirao to enter. When Hariraoji got to know this, he talked to the soldiers and took Jotirao to the venue.

When the Duke of Connaught came and took his seat, he saw Jotirao in his rustic attire sitting across him. The duke felt a sense of amazement looking at Jotirao and he kept staring at him intermittently. He had no idea who Tatya was. After the meal, Tatya stood up to give a small speech on the request of Hari Raoji. The duke was astonished when Hari Raoji told him that this rustic person was going to say something and say it in English. He listened to Tatya's speech with utmost attention. Addressing the Duke of Connaught, Tatya started his speech, "Your Highness! Whatever ideas you have formed about the socioeconomic conditions of Indians after looking at the individuals who are at this feast and the ones who will pay you visits, you must get rid of those ideas right away. These indigenous people that you have come across are a minority. The large part of people living in this country come from villages. And their main occupation is agriculture. These farmers constitute 80% of the population of Balisthan. (He would always call Hindusthan as Balisthan.) Farmers had hoped that at least under this progressive rule of the English, they would see a holistic improvement. But since our kind Queen hasn't yet realised the true condition of the farmers, her government in this country hasn't done anything to uplift them. I am in this peasant's attire today to bring to your notice the lowly status of the farmers. The 20 crore farmers in this country are living in such dire state. Your highness, when you go back, please tell your very kind mother the dreadful conditions of our 20 crore farmers. And please also convey to her the only but very important plea of these farmers, that, these true subjects of hers, who are currently going through immense hardships, must be given free and compulsory primary

education. And that please try to improve the conditions of farmers holistically through your Indian government. This will help Balisthan reach new heights of progress, and consequently the Queen and the British people will attain eternal glory. I am giving this message to you on behalf of all the farmers of Balisthan and I am humbly requesting you to convey it to our very kind Queen.”

After this short speech, Jotirao thanked the Duke of Connaught for attending the dinner. The duke thanked Hari Raoji and others present for inviting him and honouring him. He also promised that he would convey Jotirao’s message on behalf of farmers to his mother. This incident shows how invested Tatya was in bringing farmers’ issue to the attention of high-ranking officials. After coming back home, Tatya regaled Kaku with the happenings in the feast. Kaku and the rest of us felt really happy about what transpired there. The report about this feast and the speech by Tatya on the occasion were sent to Deenbandhu, and Deenbandhu published it.

8. Jotirao had a few Brahmin friends, one of whom was Moro Vitthal Walvekar. Walvekar was a close friend of Jotirao. Whenever he went to Pune from Mumbai, he would stay at Tatya’s place. It would be a treat to listen to the funny conversations between the two. They would make fun of each other. Walvekar would say, “You are nothing but a vegetable seller.” Then Jotirao would retort, “Morba, you are not even a true Brahmin. When Irani Aryabhats invaded Balisthan and conquered the land, they converted some Kshatriyas into Brahmins to implement their rule. They called them Gavjoshi and Kulkarni. You are one of them! You have the blood of Kshatriya just like us.” Walvekar would then laugh loudly and tell Kaku, “Kaku, see how

mischievous this Jotiba is!" Then we all would laugh.

Endnotes:

1 Kale does not mention the name but he is likely to be referring to Lord Willingdon who was governor of Bombay from 1913 to 1918 and viceroy of India from 1931 to 1936.

2 Shaniwarwada is a historical fortification in the city of Pune in Maharashtra. Built in 1732, it was the seat of the Peshwas of the Maratha Empire until 1818.

3 Kale is referring to the biography written by Pandharinath Sitaram Patil titled 'Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Yanche Charitra', the first full length biography of Phule to appear in print.

4 Now an outlying borough of the city of Pune in the state of Maharashtra. Earlier Dhankawadi was a small village that was subsumed into Pune in 1997.

5 Mahadev Govind Ranade—scholar, social reformer, judge and author.

6 Traditional shawl worn by men.

7 Traditional upper garment worn by men.

8 A ritual associated with folk god Khandoba.

9 Titve (टिटवे) in Marathi

10 Lezim (लेझिम) or lazium is a folk dance form from the state of Maharashtra.

11 Gauntlet-sword

12 The remnants of the dead bodies are in the form of ashes.

13 Traditional woolen blanket from Maharashtra known for its rough texture.

Main image courtesy: [Free press journal](#)